GOVERNMENT OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

FOR THE

DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD CARE SERVICES

P.E.I. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

In today's society, the Government of P.E.I. sees child care as a social, economic, and political issue.

Child care is a societal concern because it greatly affects our Island families. The long-held notion that the typical family, be it an Island family or any other Canadian family, consists of two parents, with the father as sole breadwinner and the mother at home with the children, is simply not true. In P.E.I., of 607 women who were interviewed by questionnaire subsequent to giving birth to a child during the period January to July, 1985, 378 women or 62%, were employed outside of the home, and intended to return to their place of employment after their allowable maternity leave.[1]

The fact of the matter is that women work, for any one or combination of reasons, whether economic, personal, or professional. Women also choose to stay at home with their children, again, for any one or combination of reasons.

This Government recognizes that women, and families, have a right to make these choices. This Government recognizes that all parents are making a valuable contribution to society. And this Government recognizes that all parents, whether looking after their own children at home or using alternate child care arrangements, have a genuine love and concern for their children.

Child care is an economic issue because the growing need for child care is, in part, the result of major structural changes in the economy. The rural-urban population shift has influenced labour force participation rates, so that in P.E.I., the number of females in the labour force has more than tripled in the past 25 years.

In most 2 earner families, the second income is seen as an economic necessity. In 1982, the National Council of Welfare reported that in the Atlantic Region, 43% more families would be under poverty levels if wives in those families had no earnings.

In single parent families, the economic necessity of child care services is obvious.

This Government sees good child care as a way to strengthen the family unit by relieving some of the pressures brought about by recent social and economic change.

Child care is a political issue since the provision of quality services will involve public funds and government decision-making. Government must help to ensure the provision of quality child care programs, as such services address the needs of children, and only secondarily satisfy the needs of their parents.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD CARE

History

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, sporadic and limited development of day care services was undertaken by P.E.I. Newstart, church and community groups and private interests. In 1971, the Department of Social Services was assigned responsibility for the regulation of child care facilities and the management of funds appropriated by government for day care. The Child Care Facilities Act was passed in 1973; Regulations to the Act became effective in 1977.

Prior to 1976, funding for child care was available in the form of "operating grants" to only six centres. In 1976, these grants were terminated, and the Child Care Subsidy Program was introduced. This program provided subsidy for eligible children to attend licensed child care facilities.

A large number of day care centres and kindergartens closed during the early 1980's, due to financial difficulties. The Study of Child Care Services on P.E.I. (1983) took a comprehensive look at child care in this province; its recommendations included direct funding to licensed centres, and revisions to the Child Care Facilities Act and Regulations.

In January, 1986, revised Regulations to the Child Care Facilities Act were adopted by Executive Council. The Child Care Facilities Act was revised in 1987.

Government's 1987 Throne Speech announced the introduction of direct funding to licensed centres, with implementation to begin in September, 1987.

A large increase in the number of licensed centres, increased demand from parents for quality, affordable, and accessible child care, and national attention in the form of two different Task Forces have given this program

a high profile in the mid-1980's. The Federal Government has described child care as its most important social issue. Federal initiatives in child care are expected to be announced before the end of this year.

Current Status - 1987

The Child Care Facilities Act defines child care/day care as "... the temporary care and supervision of a child and may also include the provision of a children's program."

Regulations to the Child Care Facilities Act define the following types of programs:

EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE: **"... a facility whose primary objective ... is to provide an early childhood developmental program emphasizing age appropriate activites.**

Early Childhood centres include:

- day care centre -- full or half day program, mixed age groups;
- kindergarten -- half day program, 5 year olds;
- nursery school -- half day program, 2 - 5 year olds."

DAY CARE HOME: **"... a facility in a private residence whose primary objective ... is to provide relatively informal care emphasizing family oriented activities for children."**

Day Care Homes usually offer full day programs for mixed age groups.

SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE CENTRE: **"... a facility that operates outside of school hours and ... provides a relatively unstructured program emphasizing supervision and recreation for school age children."**

OCCASIONAL CENTRE: **"... a facility which ... provides child care to individual children on a one time only or irregular basis regardless of its hours of operation, and focuses primarily on supervision."**

In September, 1987, the following types of centres are licensed on P.E.I.:

	# of centres
Early Childhood Centres:	
Day Care	28
Kindergarten/Nursery School	56
Day Care Homes:	12
School Age Child Care Centres:	6
Occasional Centres:	5
	107

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Given the increasing number of Island families using early childhood/ child care services, as well as the emergence of new types of services, results of research on the effects of day care on children, and the national attention given to this issue, the Government of P.E.I. has developed a set of Guiding Principles for the Development of Early Childhood Services in this province.

These Guiding Principles are not regulations, and are not binding on existing or proposed services. Rather they are a statement of Government's philosophy in relation to important aspects of the issues surrounding the provision of child care services. These principles will also determine the extent and direction of Government support, both financial and administrative, for licensed child care services.

Areas addressed by these principles include: 1) quality; 2) affordability; 3) service for children with special needs; 4) availability; and 5) parental choice.

1. Quality

An extensive review (1985) of North American research on the effects of day care on the development of children, families, and communities has found that,

> "... day care and other good early childhood experiences contribute to the social, intellectual and motivational development of children. The research further finds that there are no apparent deleterious effects to the emotional development of the child and that, quite to the contrary, there are indications that child-parental attachment and emotional buoyancy in experiences with other people are enhanced by good day care experiences.
>
> ... good day care has positive effects on the development of children, the well-being of the family and the short and long-term quality of life in the community."[2]

The key phrase in the above research findings is "good day care." While the prevailing belief is that day care is not harmful to children, this is an oversimplification. Day care does not **have** to be harmful -- good day care is good for children; poor day care is not.

Quality day care is a high priority for this Government. The Guiding Principles in relation to quality day care deal with the following components: a) staff; b) availability of resources; c) standards.

a) **Staff:**

The Study of Child Care Services on P.E.I. (1983) found that 100% of parents with children in day care and 98% of parents with children in kindergarten considered staff to be the most important factor in their choice of a centre.

This Government sees requirements for qualified staff, opportunities for professional development, sense of personal and professional satisfaction for staff, and low staff turnover as contributing to the quality of staff in an early childhood centre.

The major obstacle facing early childhood supervisors and program staff today is extremely low wages, often resulting in high staff turnover, and difficulties in recruiting qualified, competent people. An informal survey conducted by the Early Childhood Development Association in June, 1987, found average day care salaries to be $7.27/hour for the Director/Supervisor, and $6.00/hour for program staff.

The Provincial Government agrees with Island parents in that staff are the primary indicators of quality in an early childhood program. Staff are responsible for developing trusting relationships with children, developing and evaluating program activities, dealing with behavior management, monitoring each child's progress, communicating with parents, keeping up with new developments in the field, as well as the on-going, overall supervision and care of the children.

PRINCIPLE: **Early Childhood Supervisors and Program Staff who are trained in Early Childhood Education and experienced in their field should be recognized as competent educators who are fulfilling a vital role in the care and development of young children. This recognition should be awarded to them both professionally and by wage remuneration consistent with their training and experience.**

Comment: Government suggests an appropriate salary range for Directors to be $10 - $12/hour with an $8 - $10/hour range for Program Staff, provided Provincial standards for Certification have been completed. Government recognizes that, given the present range in salaries, it will take some centres longer than others to reach this goal. Once a centre reaches the appropriate range, provision should be made for incremental increases consistent with other increases for similar positions.

b) Availability of Resources:

Availability of resources to a centre is an important factor influencing the degree to which a quality program can be implemented. Various types of early childhood equipment is needed in order to provide for a range of types of play areas in a stimulating environment.

Program resources in an early childhood centre must allow for manipulation, discovery, and experimentation by the children, since abstract learning is not conducive to a young child's education. Such materials must be safe, and appropriate to the developmental needs of the children.

Resources must also be available to the Supervisor and staff in terms of program activities and ideas. The availability of consultation with other professionals is often crucial to the success of a quality children's program.

PRINCIPLE: **Adequate resources for both children and staff are vital to the quality of an early childhood program. Centres should make every effort to ensure that age-appropriate materials are available for the children, and are encouraged to be creative in their implementation of program activities.**

Supervisors should ensure that staff are aware of resources available to them, both in terms of written material and other professionals in the field.

c) Standards:

The Regulations to the Child Care Facilities Act set a basic level of standards by which all licensed child care facilities are to operate. It is unacceptable for any centre to fall below these standards.

Provincial standards must be reflective of current knowledge in the area of early childhood education, as well as fire and health safety. Standards must also address the nature and the type of child care services available.

The Provincial Government has the responsibility of setting standards to deal with indicators of quality. Aspects such as staff qualifications, child-staff ratio, numbers of children, group size, program, and physical space ensure a basic level of quality.

PRINCIPLE: **Provincial standards/regulations should reflect the best of current knowledge in the field to ensure high quality early childhood programs. The Child Care Facilities Board has been given the responsibility of keeping Government up-to-date on current trends and developments in this area.**

Government Support for Quality Child Care:

In order to encourage licensed child care facilities to deliver programs consistent with the above principles, Government provides the following support:

Administrative:

- comprehensive Regulations to the Child Care Facilities Act;
- revised Child Care Facilities Act (1987) to provide clear definitions of child care and reflect current trends in service delivery;
- provision of printed program resources through the Department of Health and Social Services, dealing with program development, speech and language development, nutrition, science, behavior management, administration, etc.; many resources are available in both French and English;
- availability of program consultants;
- co-sponsorship, by Department of Industry and Canada Employment Centre, of Early Childhood Extension Program offered through Holland College; this 2 year course provides 30 early childhood workers with training necessary to meet provincial requirements;
- the Job Creation Program of the Department of Health and Social Services may provide support staff to centres in specific situations.

Financial:

- direct funding to licensed child care facilities, providing Maintenance Grant to day care centres, and Flat Rate Grant to kindergartens, nursery schools, day care homes, and school age child care centres; total budget: $185,000;

- annual grant to Early Childhood Development Association ($3,800) for maintenance of Early Childhood Equipment Library, which provides developmental materials on a loan basis to licensed centres;

- sponsorship of annual Early Childhood Series, consisting of seminars and workshops across the province to provide opportunities for professional development for early childhood staff;

- subsidization of course fees for early childhood educators in specific situations.

2. Affordability

Quality child care is of no benefit to parents who cannot afford it. The weekly cost of child care is significant in proportion to the weekly income of the average Island family.

It has been argued, on both a national and provincial level, that Canada needs a "universal system of day care." Universality implies that day care services would be available for all who need/want such services, and would be free, in the same sense that attendance in public school is free.

The Government of P.E.I. does **not** support the idea of universal day care, and does not believe that the majority of Island families supports this concept either.

In 1985, a study conducted by the National Day Care Research Network found that when parents across Canada were asked, "'Who should pay for child care?', ... 81% felt parents should pay for child care on a sliding scale adjusted according to their ability to pay."[3]

In 1987, the average weekly cost for day care (full day program) ranged from $60 - $80, with slightly higher costs for infants. These costs are similar to those reported by other provinces.

While recognizing that the cost of child care is significant, the Provincial Government considers the purchase of quality child care to be a priority for families. Based on a weekly rate of $70, a full time day care placement (8 hours/day) costs approximately $1.90/hour.

The Government recognizes, however, that while the cost of child care can be justified, it is still too high for many Island families. For that reason, Government provides subsidy to eligible families to assist with the cost of licensed child care.

PRINCIPLE: **The Government of P.E.I. does NOT support a universal system of day care. Rather, Government feels parents should pay for child care services, and will assist eligible families with that cost.**

Comment: Government considers the present range of costs to be reasonable for 1987. Child care services which cost less than $60/week, unless receiving substantial community support, do not reflect the true costs of providing a quality program. Government encourages centres to keep fees within the upper limits of the current range, so that parents will continue to be able to afford licensed child care.

Government Support:

The Child Care Subsidy Program provides full or partial subsidy for eligible families to help with the cost of licensed child care. Eligibility is determined by assessment of both the reason for using child care, and family income.

This program's budget for 1987-88 is $740,000.

In 1986-87, the Child Care Subsidy Program served 807 children in 692 families.

At present, the Sliding Scale Income Test used in this program is under review.

3. Children With Special Needs

A child with special needs is one who, in order to attain the usual developmental goals, requires additional help, such as individualized attention, specialized equipment, or other considerations and resources.

These children may have physical or intellectual handicaps, visual, hearing, or speech impairments, or be emotionally disturbed.

While remedial attention may be effective at any time in a child's development, early intervention may provide the potential for enormous gains.

In recent years, more and more children with special needs have participated in licensed early childhood programs, as early childhood supervisors become more skilled at providing integrated programs, and as more young parents become aware of the benefits to their children.

Government's support of children with special needs in early childhood programs is consistent with its philosophy of supporting community based services for all disabled people.

PRINCIPLE: **Government recognizes the benefits of early intervention and integration for children with special needs. Government applauds the efforts of early childhood centres at providing such programs, and encourages more centres to provide the same. Government also encourages parents**

to consider such programs for their children. Government will continue to support both centres and parents in the provision of these services.

Government Support for Children With Special Needs in Child Care Programs:

Administrative:

- consultation is available for assessment of child's needs;
- consultation is available for program development, monitoring, and evaulation from Departments of Health and Social Services and Education;
- consultation is provided to the P.E.I. Association for Community Living's Developmental Equipment Library, which provides toys on a loan basis to parents of disabled children as well as to early childhood programs (on behalf of a disabled child).

Financial:

- the Child Care Subsidy Program covers extra costs associated with individualized programs for children with special needs, for eligible families;
- the Family Support Program assists parents of disabled children with those costs that are over and above normal costs of raising a child;
- the Department of Education assists parents with the cost of an early childhood program for visually and hearing impaired children, through the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority.
- Depending on the need of the child, the Department of Education may assist parents with the cost of an extra year of an early childhood program.

4. Availability

The variety of types of child care services available on P.E.I. has increased considerably in the last ten years. Presently, Government licenses day care centres, day care homes, kindergartens, nursery schools, school-age child care centres, and occasional centres.

The number of licensed centres in this province has also increased steadily over the last number of years. Despite this growth, demand for child care services in 1987 seems to exceed available spaces.

Parents who require child care services for infants (children younger than 2 years old) are in a particularly difficult situation, as very few licensed centres will register children who are younger than 2 years old. The majority of day care centres find that their program or facility is not conducive to quality infant care.

While research substantially confirms that infant day care, or day care experience in general, has no negative effects on the emotional development of the child, it appears that some types of care may be more advantageous for infants.[4] The National Day Care Study (1979) suggests that the care of children in small groups enhances the day care environment for both children and caregivers. Other studies appear to support day care homes for infants, because of the samller group size.

PRINCIPLE: **The Provincial Government recognizes the need for an expansion of infant day care spaces, and encourages licensed day care homes to provide child care services for this age group.**

Availability of licensed day care spaces is also a concern for parents who are employed seasonally, part-time, or who work on shifts. At present, there are no established programs in this province to meet the needs of these groups. In some cases, existing day care homes may have the flexibility to accommodate these families.

It appears, however, that the traditional type of out-of-home child care currently available in this province does not meet the needs of many of the families who require seasonal or shift care. This is especially true for families involved in farming and fishing, where hours are often long, irregular, and unpredictable.

PRINCIPLE: **The Provincial Government recognizes the urgent need for the development of child care services for families who are employed on a seasonal, shift, or part-time basis, and the need for consideration of new types of service delivery in this area.**

Government Support for Availability of Child Care:

Infant Care:

- In recognition of the benefits of small group care for infants, the Provincial Government will provide an Infant Incentive Grant for licensed day care homes who meet established criteria.

Seasonal, Part-time, Shift Care:

- In September, 1987, the Department of Health and Social Services will begin coordination of consultations with the Early Childhood Development Association, other Government agencies, and community groups to determine alternative ways of establishing child care services to meet the needs of these families.

5. Parental Choice

Government has no intention of replacing the family's responsibility or parents' role in raising their children. With few exceptions, parents are undoubtedly the best ones to care for their children. Child care services are a **support** to those parents who need to make alternate arrangements for their children for a portion of the day.

When alternate child care arrangements are required, it is the responsibility of parents to decide what type of child care is most suitable for their child. Family preferences in this matter can vary greatly. Some parents choose private, informal arrangements. Some parents choose licensed arrangements. Some prefer licensed arrangements, but require flexibility in order to meet their particular needs.

While it is parents' responsibility to select the most appropriate child care arrangement, it is Government's responsibility to ensure that parents have a choice, and that these choices are of high quality.

Government does not become involved with private, informal arrangements, provided no more than 5 preschoolers or no more than 3 infants (including the caregiver's children) are present. Government does inspect and monitor all licensed centres that come under the jurisdiction of the Child Care Facilities Act.

PRINCIPLE: **The Provincial Government believes that parents, with few exceptions, are the best ones to raise their children. In this role as primary caregiver, parents have the right to decide whether or not to use alternate child care arrangements. Parents who choose to use alternate arrangements have the right and responsibility to choose the type of child care that best suits their child's needs.**

Once parents choose the type of service required, they must then decide which centre or home to select. In order to make an informed decision, parents need to know how to evaluate a program, what to expect, what to look for, and what to ask.

Parents need to know how centres/homes are different, and what standards are required of all licensed centres/homes. Parents need to know what happens during a typical day, so that they can ask specific questions about how their child would be involved in the various daily activities. Parents need to know whether there are any "normal" behavior reactions when a child joins a preschool group.

Once the choice has been made, parents need to know what to do if something goes wrong, or if they are concerned or dissatisfied with their choice.

PRINCIPLE: **The Provincial Government recognizes and accepts its responsibility to keep parents informed in relevant matters concerning the choice of a child care program.**

It is important that parents who are making use of the Child Care Subsidy Program retain responsibility for the choice of a licensed centre or home for their child. Also, parents of special needs children must be involved in the planning of individualized programs for their children. All parents must be involved in any review or evaluation of their child's participation in a program.

PRINCIPLE: **The Provincial Government will ensure that any Government program directly involving families and licensed child care services will recognize that parents have primary responsibility for their children, and will include parents in all decision making regarding their particular service.**

Government Support for Parental Choice:

- **"A Parent's Guide to Early Childhood Programs"** is distributed by the Department of Health and Social Services. This booklet provides information for parents concerning types of licensed programs available, the Child Care Subsidy Program, characteristics of a good child care program, regulations, developmental areas and activities, questions to ask, helping a child adjust, and what to do if problems arise.

- A **"Directory to Licensed Child Care Programs"** is also available to parents, listing all licensed programs in the province, with pertinent information about each one. This directory is revised on an annual basis. This booklet is distributed by the Department of Health and Social Services.

- An important policy feature of the Child Care Subsidy Program is that parents have the responsibility of choosing the licensed program that best suits their child's needs. For children in full day programs, parents are involved in the semi-annual review of the child's placement.

- Through the Department of Health and Social Services' Child Care Subsidy Program and Family Support Program, parents of special needs children are, as required by policy, actively involved in their child's assessment, the decision to enroll in an early childhood program, selection of a centre/home, design of an individualized program, and evaluation of their child's progress.

CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the Guiding Principles described in this paper are a statement of Government's philosophy in relation to important aspects of the issues surrounding the provision of child care services. These principles will also determine the extent and direction of Government support, both financial and administrative, for licensed child care services.

While Government support for licensed child care services is on-going, the Direct Funding Program for licensed facilities and the Infant Incentive Grant, as described in this document, will only be available during the present fiscal year, ending in March, 1988. In early 1988, the Provincial Government will undertake an analysis of upcoming Federal initiatives for child care. This analysis, combined with an evaluation of the 1987-88 direct funding program, will help determine the nature of Government funding for licensed child care facilities for fiscal year 1988-89, as well as future years.

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